

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 214627

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: SHUM, TS

SUBJECT: SOUSSE TRIAL AND AFTERMATH

REF: A. TUNIS 5762 B. TUNIS 5803 C. TUNIS 5859
D. TUNIS 5894

1. DEPARTMENT COMMENDS EMBASSY'S EXCELLENT REPORTING CON-
TAINED REFTELS.

2. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEW YORK ISSUED PRESS RELEASE
AUGUST 17 WHICH APPEARS CONTAIN INFO AT VARIANCE WITH SOME
OF EMBASSY'S REPORTING. DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE
EMBASSY'S PROMPT ANALYSIS AND COMMENTS ON AI PRESS RELEASE
WHICH FOLLOWS:

QUOTE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS AGAINST TREATMENT OF
IMPRISONED TRADE UNIONISTS IN TUNISIA - AMNESTY INTERNA-
TIONAL TODAY (THURSDAY AUGUST 17, 1978) EXPRESSED CONCERN
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AT THE DECISION OF THE CRIMINAL COURT OF SOUSSE, TUNISIA,
TO TRANSFER THE CASES OF 101 TRADE UNIONISTS TO THE STATE
SECURITY COURT IN THE CAPITAL, TUNIS. AMNESTY INTERNA-
TIONAL SAID THAT THIS DECISION HIGHLIGHTS OFFICIAL TREAT-
MENT OF THE CASE AS A POLITICAL ONE RATHER THAN AN
ORDINARY CIVIL CASE. IT FOLLOWS A NUMBER OF PROCEDURAL
IRREGULARITIES WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN THE TREATMENT OF

HUNDREDS OF TRADE UNIONISTS ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH THE ONE DAY GENERAL STRIKE DECLARED BY THE GENERAL UNION OF TUNISIAN WORKERS (UGTT) ON JANUARY 26.

THE 101 (INCLUDING EIGHT WOMEN) HAD BEEN ON TRIAL BEFORE THE SOUSSE CRIMINAL COURT SINCE JULY 19 AND THE PROSECUTION HAD ASKED FOR THE DEATH SENTENCE FOR 39 OF THE DEFENDANTS. AI SENT AN OBSERVER TO ATTEND PART OF THEIR TRIAL AS WELL AS TWO OTHER TRIALS AT SFAX DURING JULY. ONE OF THE TRIALS AT SFAX INVOLVED 21 TRADE UNIONISTS ARRESTED IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY, FIVE OF WHOM WERE SENTENCED TO 2 YEARS' IMPRISONMENT. THE SECOND TRIAL INVOLVED 27 PEOPLE ARRESTED FOLLOWING A STRIKE IN GAFSA IN NOVEMBER 1977, 20 OF WHOM WERE GIVEN SENTENCES RANGING FROM 4 MONTHS' TO 2 1/2 YEARS' IMPRISONMENT.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF TRADE UNIONISTS CLAIMED DURING THEIR TRIALS THAT THEY HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO TORTURE OR MALTREATMENT DURING THEIR DETENTION IN POLICE CUSTODY AND THAT CONFESSIONS HAD BEEN EXTRACTED FROM THEM UNDER DURESS. AI SAID IT WAS CALLING ON THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT TO INITIATE AN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO ALL ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE. THE DEFENDANTS ARE BEING TRIED ON A WIDE RANGE OF CHARGES, INCLUDING OFFENSES AGAINST STATE SECURITY
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AND INCITEMENT TO CIVIL STRIFE.

NO DATE HAS YET BEEN DECIDED FOR THE NEW TRIAL OF THE 101, NOR FOR OTHER TRADE UNIONISTS CURRENTLY DETAINED IN TUNIS CIVIL PRISON. THESE INCLUDE HABIB ACHOUR, FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UGTT AND 10 MEMBERS OF ITS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. THREE OF THE CHARGES AGAINST THEM CARRY THE DEATH PENALTY. ALL 11 HAVE BEEN HELD IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT SINCE THEIR ARREST NEARLY SEVEN MONTHS AGO.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS CONCERNED THAT MANY OF THE TRADE UNIONISTS ARE IMPRISONED FOR EXERCISING THEIR RIGHTS OF FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.
UNQUOTE.

FYI - WE WOULD HOPE TO BE ABLE TO SHARE WITH AI WASHINGTON OFFICE AT LEAST SOME OF EMBASSY'S REMARKS, ESPECIALLY IN REGARD TO FACTUAL DIFFERENCES INVOLVED. CHRISTOPHER

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